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ABSTRACT

Drawing on methods currently employed at St. Philip's College (San Antonio, Texas), this paper describes six strategies for teaching critical reading skills to developmental students. For each of the methods presented, relevant resources are cited, a step-by-step instructional approach is provided, and the purpose and goals of the specific strategy are reviewed. In the first method described, students listen to an old radio show audio tape up to a point just prior to plot resolution. Students then write their own predicted ending, individually or in pairs. In the second method, students briefly preview short stories individually and then divide into small groups to read the sections aloud to each other, stopping at points to discuss where the story is headed. In the third approach, students read the title, introductory paragraphs, subheadings, and conclusions of a selected piece. They then write an organizing paragraph to help them focus during a subsequent reading. In the fourth approach, a chapter from a general education text is divided into sections by subheadings. Students then work in groups to analyze one particular section. The students discuss their section in depth before the class, and then return to the smaller groups to discuss the entire chapter. The fifth approach utilizes vocabulary lists or lists of roots and affixes. Students write synonyms or words from the same root, pair up to consolidate lists, and then share these lists with the class. In the final strategy, students re-write textual paragraphs in their own words, using transitional words to combine sentences. Students then transpose the closing thought from the original paragraph to the beginning of their own paragraph. (PAA)

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BEYOND THE LITERAL LEVEL

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Beyond the Literal Level

As college reading professionals, many of us walk a fine line between the mastery-of-skills approach necessitated by the Texas Academic Skills Program and the holistic, reading-as-process approaches advocated in the literature of recent years. At the same time, we are being bombarded by information about critical reading and thinking, particularly now that "critical reading" is a component of the core curriculum. Certainly, we want our students to develop the ability to read critically, but we first must get them to read period. Developmental students, many of whom have never read a book or even a newspaper voluntarily, must be drawn into an active, critical reading stance through structured lessons that provide fast feedback and nurture of their self-image as competent readers.

At St. Philip's College, one of the community colleges of the Alamo Community College District, our developmental students are scheduled for five hours of instruction per week. Two of these hours are devoted to an individualized lab program, using print materials one day and computer software another day, with the instructor guiding the students through a prescribed program in a skills-mastery format. In this setting, critical reading primarily is approached by the types of questions asked of the student by the instructor. When a student is having trouble with locating the main idea, for instance, the instructor will ask her to say what the writer was trying to get across before looking at

multiple-choice possibilities. In other words, even in a setting in which skills are emphasized, interaction between the student, instructor, and text can encourage thinking beyond the literal comprehension level. It is in the three hours per week of classroom instruction, however, that group activities encouraging higher level thinking can be best utilized.

In order to develop strategies and find materials suitable for postsecondary developmental readers, I have found it helpful to borrow and adapt teaching strategies designed for elementary and junior high classrooms. The resources are a different story, however. We all know how quickly an adult who reads at sixth-grade level is turned off by a sixth-grade story. Therefore, the challenge for college reading instructors is to find a suitable match of materials and methods for our students. In the pages that follow, I have abstracted several methods that I have found helpful, with suggestions about sources of materials.

Much of the work on critical reading accomplished over the last decade echoes a statement voiced by Frank Smith in 1979 in Reading Without Nonsense. He said that comprehension depends upon prediction. By prediction he meant, not reckless guessing, but looking at the most possible outcomes or results - narrowing down alternatives to the most likely ones. He pointed out that good readers don't look at a page of print with no expectation of what it's going to say. Weak readers do that! Prediction is asking good questions;

comprehension is the process of getting these questions answered. Comprehension isn't a finished result. It is the basis for making sense of something.

For children prediction is a natural process. We who teach developmental adult students know that many of them have lost that sense of prediction or wonder; something has stifled it. Therefore, a vital part of our job is reviving that tendency to question and to expect to get an answer or a message of some kind.

One suggestion for easing adult students into the prediction proof process follows.

UNFINISHED STORY VARIATION

RESOURCES: AUDIO TAPES OF OLD RADIO SHOWS, SUCH AS "INNER SANCTUM" (AVAILABLE FROM ONCE UPON A RADIO)

STEPS:

1. PLAY A MYSTERY SHOW TAPE UP TO A POINT JUST PRIOR TO THE RESOLUTION OF THE PLOT.
2. STOP TAPE. ASK STUDENTS TO WRITE A CONDENSED VERSION OF THEIR PREDICTED ENDING, INDIVIDUALLY OR IN PAIRS.

USE THIS TECHNIQUE TO WEAN STUDENTS FROM TELEVISION DEPENDENCY AND TO ENCOURAGE THE PREDICTION PROCESS.

The Directed Reading-Thinking Activity emphasizes purpose setting and prediction, and involves the reader in confirming or revising predictions and interpretations. When Russell Stauffer (1969) published his first works about the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, he was most concerned with children in the primary grades. He said that reading

is a thinking process and that the reader consistantly tests assumptions as he reads. He may find the answer he is seeking literally; he may find implied answers and then may have to rephrase his question or suspend judgment until more reading has been done; or he may have to declare new purposes or ask new questions. When this kind of active reading is done in groups or pairs, the thinking process will take off in different directions because of input from different individuals. The prediction-proof process seems to me to be equally valuable for adult developmental students. Therefore, I use a DR-TA approach in my classes, beginning with short articles and essays and building up to shared book reading. Sample directions follow.

DR-TA MODIFIED FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

RESOURCES: SHORT ESSAY OR ARTICLES FROM PERIODICALS;
SHORT STORIES

STEPS:

1. PREVIEW BRIEFLY.
2. DIVIDE INTO SMALL GROUPS OF TWO OR THREE.
3. PARTNERS READ INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS ALOUD.
4. STOP AND ASK WHERE THE WRITER SEEMS TO BE HEADED AND WHAT QUESTIONS MAY BE ANSWERED.
5. PARTNERS DECIDE WHETHER TO CONTINUE READING ALOUD OR TO READ TO A CERTAIN POINT SILENTLY.
6. AFTER READING THE AGREED-UPON SECTION, STOP AGAIN AND PREDICT THE ENDING.
7. READ THE CONCLUSION.

8. DECIDE TOGETHER WHETHER THE PREDICTIONS WERE ACCURATE, WHETHER THE AUTHOR DELIVERED WHAT WAS PROMISED, WHETHER THE ENDING SEEMS VALID
9. GROUPS COMPOSE A SUMMARY PARAGRAPH; REDUCE TO A SUMMARY SENTENCE, IF POSSIBLE.
10. GROUPS SHARE SUMMARY STATEMENTS WITH WHOLE GROUP.

FOR SHARED BOOK READING, SAME BASIC PROCESS, WITH PARTNERS AGREEING ON PLACES TO PAUSE AND MAKE PREDICTIONS OR REVISE EARLIER PREDICTIONS. SOME CLASS TIME IS SET ASIDE FOR PARTNERS TO TOUCH BASE EACH WEEK.

One excellent source of short essays on a variety of topics is Patterns by Mary Lou Conlin (1991). This is the third edition of a book from Houghton Mifflin. Other good sources of essays and short stories for paired or group study are Developing College Reading and Improving College Reading by Lee Jacobs (1991) and Best Short Stories (Advanced) edited by Raymond Harris (1980).

As an aid to prediction, many reading professionals advocate pre-reading organizers when students approach content textbooks. Pre-reading organizers can follow several models The "survey" step in SQ3R and "preview" step in PREP are, in effect, pre-reading organizers and may be very effective when combined with the questioning step. One type is prepared by the instructor. Another type is the pre-reading written organizer, which results in a student-composed summary paragraph based on an overview and then validated - or

changed - following the reading of the selection or chapter Following is a sample of directions to guide the student in preparing a pre-reading written organizer.

PRE-READING WRITTEN ORGANIZERS

You will be learning to write an organizing paragraph about what you will read BEFORE you actually read it. The purpose of the preview with a written organizer is to enable you to pre-organize and focus on the ideas in the material you will be studying.

To write an organizing paragraph, follow these steps:

STEP 1: READ THE TITLE.

STEP 2: READ THE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS.

STEP 3: READ ANY SUBHEADINGS IN THE MATERIAL.

STEP 4: READ THE CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS.

STEP 5: WRITE YOUR ORGANIZING PARAGRAPH.

HOW TO WRITE AN ORGANIZING PARAGRAPH.

A. From information gathered in Steps 1, 2, 3 and 4, write a sentence which captures the main idea or main point of the article.

B. Next, write a series of sentences which provide details for the main idea sentence, or which relate to or explain the main idea. For these sentences, you may have to glance over the whole article to pick up important details.

C. On a separate sheet of paper, jot down anything that puzzles you about your preview. Are there

any holes left?

STEP 6: READ THE SELECTION.

STEP 7: MAKE ANY REVISIONS OR ADDITIONS NEEDED TO TURN YOUR PRE-READING PARAGRAPH INTO A SUMMARY.

In an interesting study reported in the most recent Journal of Reading, researchers Groller, Kender, and Honeyman (1991) found that advance organizers composed by instructors did not result in as great a gain in comprehension of texts as a combination of advance organizers with metacognitive strategies. In other words, students who were taught how to use, monitor and evaluate their use of an advance organizer made greater gains than those who had organizers imposed on them. This study, though drawn from high school students, seems to validate the value of getting the student at postsecondary level actively involved in developing his or her own pre-reading organizer.

Rex Easley (1988), in his contribution to Focus on Collaborative Learning, advocates going a step further in generating an exchange of ideas about a chapter or story. He gives potential essay test questions to students to use as the basis for group discussions of the story being studied. Students are encouraged to critique each others' responses, requiring them to back up their answers with specific references to the story. They are rewarded, in a way, for listening to each other's ideas, because they are allowed to use their marked texts and notes when they take the actual test. In deciding which ideas are worth noting

or using as springboards, they are synthesizing, evaluating -- in other words, using higher level cognitive skills. The instructor's role in this activity is to keep discussion moving forward and then to back off and respect the students thinking. On the test, students must feel free to say whatever they want as long as they can defend their views with examples and references to the story itself.

From among a variety of collaborative learning approaches likely to generate interaction and shared thinking, I have chosen to focus on two. One is the Jigsaw Method introduced by Aronson et al. in 1978 and adapted by Dolores Perin (1988). The second is an "adult" version of Think-Pair-Share, a technique proposed by McTighe and Lyman (1988).

THE JIGSAW METHOD

RESOURCES: TEXTS FROM GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES, SUCH AS PSYCHOLOGY

STEPS:

1. PREVIEW A CHAPTER, USING SUBHEADS TO DIVIDE INTO "CHUNKS."
2. BREAK INTO GROUPS OF EQUAL SIZE: NUMBER TO MATCH NUMBER OF "CHUNKS."
3. ALL GROUPS READ SUMMARY TO GET AN OVERVIEW OF THE MATERIAL.
4. EACH GROUP MEMBER TAKES RESPONSIBLITY FOR A PARTICULAR CONCEPT.
5. GROUPS DISBAND AND REGROUP WITH COUNTERPARTS FROM OTHER GROUPS.

6. "EXPERT" GROUPS READ AND DISCUSS THEIR SECTION OF CHAPTER IN DEPTH.
7. ORIGINAL GROUPS RE-FORM AND SHARE THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXPERTS.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE VARIATION

RESOURCES: VOCABULARY LISTS OR LISTS OF ROOTS AND AFFIXES

STEPS:
1. ESTABLISH A FIVE-MINUTE TASK: LISTING SYNONYMS OF A GROUP OF WORDS, FOR INSTANCE, OR THINKING OF SEVERAL WORDS FROM THE SAME ROOT. (TWO STUDENTS WILL HAVE THE SAME WORDS OR ROOTS ASSIGNED.)
2. INDIVIDUALS THINK OR WRITE ON THEIR OWN FOR THREE MINUTES.
3. PAIRS THEN TEAM UP TO COMPARE LISTS AND ADD TO THEM.
4. EACH PAIR THEN SHARES WITH THE CLASS.
5. THEIR MASTER LISTS ARE COLLATED AND COPIED FOR WHOLE CLASS TO USE IN PREPARING FOR TEST.

OTHER TASKS ADAPTABLE FOR THIS KIND OF QUICKIE INCLUDE INFERENCING FROM SHORT PASSAGES OR SORTING THE MAJOR AND MINOR DETAILS IN TOPICAL PARAGRAPHS. THE MAIN PURPOSE IS TO STIMULATE INTERACTION AND TO UNDERLINE THE IMPORTANCE OF EACH INDIVIDUAL'S THINKING.

An interesting strategy initiated by one of my colleagues, Dr. Laureen Cate (1987), uses sentence-combining and organizational revision to enhance higher-level thinking.

Dr. Cate used passages on the cards in the Reading for Understanding kits from Science Research Associates in her study. Because the RFU cards span from 3.0 to 15.0, they provide material suitable for readers at any level. Directions for this activity follow; a sample is also included.

RFU REWRITES

RESOURCES: READING FOR UNDERSTANDING, BOXES 2 AND 3, SCIENCE RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

STEPS:

1. AFTER PLACING STUDENTS AT THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL LEVELS IN RFU, SELECT SOME OF THEIR COMPLETED PASSAGES FOR REWRITING
2. FOR THIS STRUCTURED REWRITING, STUDENTS FOLLOW THESE STEPS
   - A. COPY THE PARAGRAPH WITH ITS COMPLETION.
   - B. LOOK UP ANY WORDS YOU ARE UNSURE OF.
   - C. JOT DOWN THE FACTS IN THE PARAGRAPH IN REVERSE.
   - D. DECIDE WHICH SENTENCES CAN BE COMBINED, AND FIND AN APPROPRIATE TRANSITIONAL WORD FROM THE LIST OF TRANSITIONS.
   - E. WRITE THE PARAGRAPH WITH THE CLOSING THOUGHT OF THE ORIGINAL PARAGRAPH AT THE BEGINNING, AND WITH AT LEAST ONE SENTENCE LESS THAN THE ORIGINAL PARAGRAPH.
3. AS STUDENTS MAKE PROGRESS IN THEIR READING LEVELS, THEIR COMPOSITION OF COMPLEX SENTENCES SHOULD EVOLVE. THE INSTRUCTOR MUST DECIDE

WHETHER TO ASSIGN GRADES BASED ON THE QUANTITY OF WRITING ACCOMPLISHED OR ON A GRADING SCALE SUCH AS A MAXIMUM OF FIVE POINTS FOR EACH WELL-STRUCTURED PARAGRAPH.

4. TO ASSESS PROGRESS, FORMS A AND B OF THE RFU PLACEMENT TEST MAY BE USED AS PRE AND POST TESTS.

SAMPLE RFU REWRITE

I. ORIGINAL PASSAGE:

Most cities have limited space, but this fact does not seem to deter people from moving into them. There is more movement towards the cities than away from them. Consequently, cities become

A. trading centers
B. overpopulated
C. wealthy
D. cultural centers

II. RE-ORDERING IDEAS

1. Cities become overpopulated
2. There's more movement toward cities than away from them.
3. Lack of space doesn't keep people from moving to the cities.

III. REWRITTEN PASSAGE:

Overpopulation becomes a problem when more people move to cities than away from them. Lack of space doesn't seem to keep people from moving to the cities.

-or-

Because more people move to cities than away from

them, cities tend to become too crowded.

(NOTE: In the first revision, sentence-combining reduced three sentences to two; in the second, the ideas in the original three sentences were compressed into one sentence.)

As we encourage our college students to broaden their reading experience and to enlarge their critical thinking abilities, we need an array of resources, techniques, and strategies close at hand. From these we can then pull those most appropriate for the particular students we teach. Only by enlarging our teaching repertoires and remaining open to fresh approaches can we motivate and nurture our students' growth as readers who <u>think</u> and thinkers who <u>read</u>.

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